

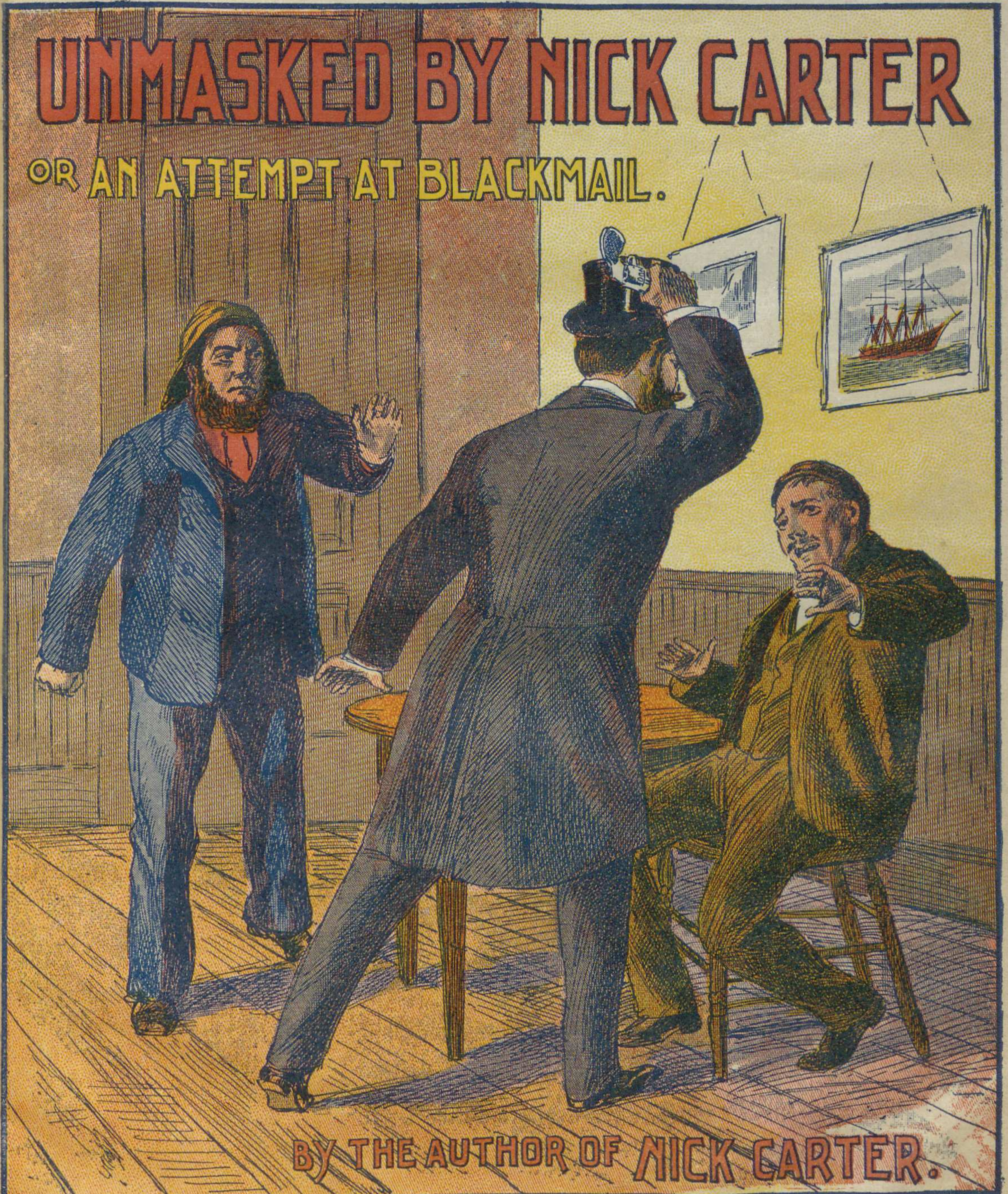
NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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UNMASKED BY NICK CARTER OR AN ATTEMPT AT BLACKMAIL.



BY THE AUTHOR OF NICK CARTER.

THE DOCTOR DREW A REVOLVER, AND WITH THE BUTT OF IT STRUCK THE THIEF A RESOUNDING BLOW ON THE HEAD.

NICK CARTER WEEKLY.

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Unmasked by Nick Carter;

OR,

AN ATTEMPT AT BLACKMAIL.

By the Author of "NICK CARTER."

CHAPTER I.

A SOCIETY BELLE'S LOVE.

The following advertisement appeared not long ago in the New York *Herald*:

"Lost—on Monday while riding in "L" train, a pocket-book containing a small sum of money, theatre ticket, and memorandums. Suitable reward will be paid and no questions asked by returning pocket-book, theatre ticket, and papers to Q. Z., *Herald* office."

The day following the publication of the above a young woman sat in her boudoir in a handsome and richly furnished mansion a few blocks from Madison square, gazing out of the window with an expression of mingled anxiety and fear on her beautiful face.

"If they should fall into any but honest hands," she muttered, "I am lost, for if Horace learns what the letters contain, he will spurn me with scorn and contempt."

While she mused bitterly over her situ-

ation the bell rang, announcing the presence of some one at the front door.

Hope instantly sprang into her heart.

"I expect no one to-day," was her thought, "that is, no one but the person who shall come in answer to the advertisement."

As she arose and stood before her mirror, her scarlet lips slightly parted over her small milk-white teeth in satisfaction at her appearance, the sound of a well-known voice in the hall below caused the red flush of hope to leave her cheeks, and an ashy paleness to take its place.

"He may already know the terrible truth," spoke her guilty conscience, "and he may have come to end our engagement."

She trembled for an instant at the thought of what to her was a crushing possibility, but her self-possession returned as her quick, intelligent brain went over the ground and showed the improbability of her conjecture.

"How weak I am," she muttered, in contempt at her late fears. "He know so soon? Pshaw, there's been no chance for him to make the discovery that I am"—she paused, bit her lip, and went on—"that I am not the innocent, guileless creature that his soft heart has pictured me."

Looking once more into the mirror she gave a few deft touches to her blonde hair, and there was a steely brilliancy in her violet eyes as she turned to await the coming of the servant.

"Please, Miss Ferrier, it's Mr. Horace. You told me to admit him whenever he came."

"Yes, Fanny, so I did, but—but to-day I am not at home to any one. I am indisposed. Stay," as the servant was about to depart, "I will send him a note, that he may not think my refusal to see him is the false, conventional one."

This is what Horace Boughton, the handsome young stock broker, read a few minutes later:

"You dear, impatient creature—I am suffering from neuralgia, and am such a fright that I couldn't think of seeing you to-day. Come to-morrow and be assured of a welcome then that shall amply compensate you for your present disappointment."

"Your own,
"CLARICE."

Boughton pressed the delicately perfumed missive to his lips and then prepared to depart.

Fanny, the sewing-maid, looked at his tall, admirably-proportioned figure, caught a glimpse of the dark, honest eyes which reflected the deep, passionate love that filled his heart, and sighed softly.

"Poor young man," she thought. "It's a shame that he should be deceived in this outrageous manner."

But the girl's pity went no further.

She had a good place, and she was anxious to retain it.

The mansion belonged to Miss Ferrier's aunt, a bed-ridden invalid, and it was heavily mortgaged.

But few people were aware of the fact, however, and in society the queenly Clarice was regarded as an heiress.

Horace Boughton, rich and clever, intellectually, but of a trusting, unsuspecting nature, loved her for herself alone, and never gave a thought to her financial worth.

He had easily surrendered to the charms of her blonde, sensuous beauty, and the fascinations she so artfully exercised.

She did not love him, but her desire was to become the mistress of his wealth, and be able to shine with even greater luster in the society whose exigent, capricious demands required of her at present so many makeshifts and petty economies.

And now something had occurred which threatened to blast all her prospects. Her pocket-book had been lost, and in it were letters which compromised her reputation.

Half an hour after Horace Boughton had taken his leave, she came to the conclusion that the person who had found the pocket-book had resolved not to answer the advertisement.

There was but one thing to be done if she hoped to recover the lost property, and that was to seek the services of some shrewd and skillful detective.

Fanny, the maid, who was to some extent her mistress' confidante, they having been schoolmates in the days when Clarice was living in humbleness and poverty, had urged her to take this step the moment she heard of the loss.

"And if you'll take my advice, Miss Ferrier," she said, earnestly, "you'll see Dick Huttell. He's in a private agency on Broadway and I know he's a keen one."

"Are you acquainted with him?" asked her mistress, rather sharply.

The maid blushed and then stammer-

ingly admitted that she had known him for over a year.

"A thief stole my watch over at Coney Island at a picnic last summer," she said, "and Dick—Mr. Huttell, I mean, who was a stranger to me, then, found it in half an hour."

"Yes, I remember. He's the little, smooth-faced, Henry Irving sort of a looking fellow, who called to see you last week."

"Yes, ma'am," said Fanny, meekly, "and he's not only the living image of Henry Irving, but he can act like him. I've seen and heard him."

"A very remarkable young man, then."

"Indeed he is."

Miss Ferrier thought of her conversation with Fanny later in the day.

"Why not?" she said to herself.

"This Huttell may be the very man to succeed."

Late in the afternoon she was in one of the private offices of Starr & Co.'s detective agency, in earnest conversation with Mr. Richard Huttell.

There was a look of eager interest on his lean, strongly marked face, as the society belle stated her loss.

"Can you describe any of the persons who were on the car with you?" he asked.

"Let me see. The car was crowded, and I can't think of anything that impressed me except a stout old lady who sat next to me on one of the side seats."

"I can imagine the sort of impression she left," laughed the detective.

Miss Ferrier did not smile at this witicism.

She rather resented Huttell's familiarity, and it was gall and wormwood to her to make him the repository of her secrets.

The detective's face flushed slightly at her cold glance, and he went on hurriedly:

"The stout woman—was there anything remarkable in her appearance?"

"She had a red, pudgy face, and she smelled of beer."

"Did you see her hands?"

"Yes. They were around a baby all the time."

"Then it was not she who stole the pocket-book."

"Do you believe it was stolen?"

"It might have been. Now, who was on the other side of you?"

"An asthmatic old gentleman. He wheezed so much that I should have left the car before reaching my destination, if he had not noticed my distress and repugnance, and taken a vacant seat in a corner."

"Describe him as minutely as you can."

"I am afraid my description will be inadequate."

"Why?"

"Because the greater part of his face was covered with a muffler."

"Was he smooth-faced, or did he wear a mustache or beard?"

"He wore a heavy beard—almost white; and his hair was long and white."

"His hands—did you see them?"

"No. He kept them concealed in his pockets."

"That's unfortunate," said Dick Huttell, with a shake of the head.

"Why so?"

"Because I can tell a man's character by his hands. The pickpocket has slender hands with long, flexible fingers."

He showed one of his own hands as he spoke. It was small and chubby.

Clarice Ferrier looked at it indifferently. Then she said:

"Hadn't we better dismiss the idea of theft, and take up the other branch of the subject?"

"Yes, yes. But I wanted first to determine whether there was a possibility that the pocket-book might not have been stolen from you in the car. The asthmatic is the only person who might have filched it, and yet——"

He paused and looked thoughtfully at the floor.

"And yet what?" queried she, in some curiosity.

"And yet I do not think he was the thief. If I am not mistaken, he is a respectable coal dealer in Brooklyn. I shall satisfy myself on that point within a few hours. Now as to the proposition that you accidentally dropped the book. First question under that head: Are you sure you had it when you entered the car?"

"Perfectly so, for I had to open it to find the money for my fare."

"When did you first discover your loss?"

"When I got off the car at Thirty-fourth street."

"Did you feel in your pocket for it?"

"No, and for the very good reason that I had no pocket, and had carried it in my hand from the moment I undertook the journey."

"Certainly, of course; I should have inferred as much," said Huttell, hastily. "And what did you do when you found the book was gone?"

"I waited at the house of a friend in the neighborhood until the train returned. Then I saw the conductor for a moment when the train stopped at the station, and asked him if he found it or knew the name of the person into whose hands it had fallen. A negative answer to both of these questions was returned."

"And then you went to the *Herald* office and inserted the advertisement?"

"I sent my maid."

"Ah, yes. Fanny. That amounts to the same thing."

Dick Huttell now looked her searchingly in the face.

"Well?" she said, coldly.

"I must have your fullest confidence," he said, quietly, but impressively. "It is not the money you are anxious to recover?"

"No."

"Nor the theatre ticket?"

"No."

"Therefore it must be the letters."

"Yes."

She cast down her eyes for a moment, then raised them resolutely.

"Who was the writer of the letters?"

"Must I tell you?"

"Yes, or my work may come to naught. If the finder is holding them for the purpose of blackmail, he will not confine his operations to you; he will pay his respects to the writer of the letters as well."

Miss Ferrier turned pale.

"And," continued Huttell, with a glance full of meaning, "he may not stop with the writer. There may be other parties who would consider the letters of inestimable value."

Miss Ferrier shuddered.

"I will tell you all," she said, with a strong effort at self-control.

The detective put on an expression of professional complacency.

"The letters were written by Dr. Winze."

"The noted specialist in nervous diseases?"

"Yes."

"He is married is he not?"

"Yes."

"And the letters—were they such as might be written by one friend to another or by a doctor to his patient?"

"I have been and am his patient."

Huttell looked at the beautiful woman who appeared to be the embodiment of physical health and smiled inwardly.

"But the letters could not have been mere business communications or you would not be so anxious to regain possession of them."

"They contained no reference to business—in the medical line I mean."

"Then I am to infer that they would not have met the approval of the doctor's wife?"

Miss Ferrier flushed slightly.

"They were the insane utterances of a man who had forgotten his position in society, his duties——"

"To his wife?"

"Probably the lady who bears his name would so construe them."

"I see," said Huttell, in a cool, business-like tone. "The doctor fell in love with his patient, and wrote her letters which revealed his passion and——"

He paused, and his gaze became more intent—impertinent she thought—than ever.

"I said I would tell you all," she said. "In the meantime, please put a bridle upon your imagination."

"I beg your pardon," he meekly returned.

"The letters referred to appointments and some other matters which I do not care to have made public."

Huttell nodded his head.

He now understood without further explanation the exact relationship that had existed between the stylish doctor and the society belle.

"I had intended to pay the person who found the pocket-book, and brought it to me with the original contents intact, one hundred dollars. I will give you five hundred, if you will place the lost property in my hands."

Dick Huttell smiled.

"I accept the commission, and I think I shall succeed. There is a chance that I may recover the letters to-morrow afternoon."

Miss Ferrier's face brightened instantly.

"If I succeed, it will be by means of the theatre ticket, which you informed me, when you stated your case, was for Wednesday afternoon's matinee at the Garden Theatre."

"Do you think the thief will dare to use the ticket?"

"It is very probable, for it is not likely that he would suspect you had employed a detective so soon after the insertion of

the advertisement. If he does not go himself—assuming for the moment that the thief is a man—he may give the ticket to some one else, and through the second party the person we want may be tracked."

"Your reasoning is plausible."

"And again," pursued Huttell, "the thief may be a beginner in the business, and therefore not gifted with the shrewdness and cunning of the professional bird of prey. The matinee will decide this point."

"You must report to me to-morrow evening whether you have recovered the property or not."

"I will do so. May I ask who gave you the ticket?"

"Dr. Winze."

"He will be at the matinee, I presume?"

"Yes."

"In an adjoining seat to that called for by the missing ticket?"

"Yes."

Dick Huttell did not ask his fair client why the doctor had given her the ticket instead of retaining it himself and accompanying her to the performance.

Dr. Winze's position as a married man forbade such a display.

And yet he had provided for a meeting with Miss Ferrier by taking a seat next to hers.

The conversation with the detective lasted but a few minutes longer.

Huttell rubbed his hands in satisfaction when the door was closed upon her form.

"Succeed!" he said to himself, in supreme confidence. "I am bound to succeed."

The next afternoon he was at the Garden Theatre ten minutes before the opening of the performance in a disguise that was not likely to be penetrated.

Five minutes before the curtain went up Dr. Winze came down the aisle and took his seat.

A minute afterward a young girl of

modest appearance, who evidently belonged to the middle walks of life, was ushered into the seat called for by the ticket which Miss Ferrier had lost.

Dick Huttell, sitting close by, looked at the girl and frowned.

She was pretty and refined, and in her large brown eyes there lurked no trace of evil.

Clearly she had not found the pocket-book.

How, then, could she have come in possession of the ticket?"

Huttell speculated over the matter in vain.

But when the girl left the theatre he followed her to a respectable, but unpretentious, dwelling in Harlem.

Before leaving the locality he learned that her name was Rose Chaney, that she was a dressmaker, and lived with her invalid mother.

That evening when he made his report to Miss Ferrier, he did not notice a tough-looking individual about medium height, who stood at the corner nearby intently watching his movements.

Nor had he the slightest suspicion that he was being shadowed when he left the mansion half an hour later and returned to his Broadway office.

The tough saw him enter Starr & Co.'s door, and then hailed a cab and was driven to an aristocratic dwelling on Twenty-third street.

It was nine o'clock when he rang the bell.

To the servant who came to the door he said, curtly:

"Is der doc in?"

"No."

"When'll he be in?"

"Not before midnight. He has gone to attend a patient over in Brooklyn."

"H'm. Den I'll have ter see der missus. Give her dis cyard, Susan."

"My name's Mary," snapped the servant.

"Yer don't say," said the tough, impudently. "Well, Mary, yer pooty enough ter be Susan. See?"

The maid elevated her nose, though she was not insensible to the compliment that the uncouth caller's words conveyed.

"I ain't no dude," he went on, glancing at his shabby clothes, "but I've got der dough, all der same; see?"

Mary's nose went up still higher.

She then hurried away to give the card to her mistress.

There was a look of surprise on her face when she returned.

"You may come in," she said, shortly.

The tough smiled and followed her through the drawing-room and into the library.

A lady of about thirty, with a pale, anxious face, arose from the lounge on which she had been reclining and gave him her hand, with a faint smile.

"You have come sooner than I expected, Mr. Carter. I hope you are the bearer of good news."

The great detective, for it was he, answered quietly:

"I have made some discoveries, Mrs. Winze, and I think I am in a fair way to succeed."

CHAPTER II.

NICK CARTER IN THE FIELD.

Mrs. Winze was a woman who had suffered much.

When she married Dr. Winze he seemed to her the beau ideal of a man.

Handsome and intelligent, with a dashing manner and a fascinating address, he had easily won the winsome but unsophisticated country maid.

In a few months she was disillusionized.

The doctor began first to neglect her and then to abuse her when she remonstrated.

At last he came out with the brutal truth:

"You deceived me," he said, after one of their domestic quarrels; "you led me to believe before our marriage that you were your uncle's heiress."

"So I am," she calmly replied.

"A pretty heiress, you are," he sneered. "Here the old boy is dead, and you haven't received a cent of his money."

"But I will get the whole of his fortune when I am thirty years of age."

"Twelve years to wait. He might as well have thrown his millions into the river, for we may both be dead before the twelve years have passed."

She had nothing to say in answer to this speech, but her look said plainer than words: "Oh, how I despise you."

As his practice increased, his home hours became fewer and fewer, until at the time that this story opens, he spent all his days, and nearly all his evenings, away from her.

Mrs. Winze endured his harshness and neglect in silence, until about six months before the arrival of the thirtieth anniversary of her birth.

Then a remark made by the doctor, which was followed by a certain discovery, awakened her from her lethargy, and made her resolve to free herself from her hateful bonds.

"In six months we will be able to take a mansion nearer Broadway," he said, with a smile, the first he had bestowed on her for years.

The little word "we" irritated her.

"I have not made up my mind what I shall do with my money," she said, quickly, and with a little rasp in her voice.

"As your husband," he replied, coolly, "I may be able to advise you."

Nothing more was said on the subject.

The next day she had reason to go to her husband's down town office for money.

He had never given her an allowance, and whenever she wanted money for her personal needs she had to ask him for it.

Arrived in front of the office door she heard the voice of a woman within.

"There," said the voice, "you shan't kiss me again for a week."

"What!" exclaimed the doctor, in a mock-angry tone. "Starve the man you love and who loves you?"

"Hush!" replied the woman, in alarm. "You may be heard."

Mrs. Winze, with a white face, and lips tightly pressed together, withdrew from the building noiselessly.

But she posted herself in a hallway across the street so that she could observe the woman when she left the doctor's office. In a few minutes Clarice Ferrier, heavily veiled, came down the stairs.

Mrs. Winze saw her enter a street car, but was not quick enough to become a passenger herself.

With her mind made up to a certain course of action, she returned to her husband's office.

He was alone when she entered.

After obtaining the money which she had come for, she said, carelessly:

"Who was that woman who left here a few minutes ago?"

The doctor started, and then looked at her keenly.

But her face was a mask.

"Oh," he said, indifferently. "That's one of my patients."

"What's her name?"

"Mrs. Archer of Brooklyn," was the prompt answer.

"He lies," thought the wife. "But I will find out who she is, and before a week has passed."

She spent the most of her time during the ensuing three days in watching the doctor's office.

On the third day Miss Ferrier, veiled as before, paid another visit to the doctor.

Mrs. Winze, at the door, heard enough to convince her that the woman was something more than a patient.

She also heard the doctor say something which made her heart stand still.

This time she tracked Miss Ferrier to her home and learned her name and standing in society.

Having obtained this information, she called on Nick Carter, the great New York detective.

"I want a divorce from my husband," she said. "He is a bad man."

"Such cases are not in my line," responded Nick. "Hadn't you better——"

"Please hear my story first," she interrupted, with a pleading look.

"Very well."

"I am afraid of my life," she said, shudderingly.

"Why should the doctor want to murder you?"

"He is in love with another woman, and I believe he would have put me out of the way before this but for the money which will come to me six months hence."

Then she told him about her uncle's fortune.

"When that comes into my hands he will try to get rid of me."

"What leads you to think that he would take such a terrible step?"

"From words that he used at his last interview with the woman he is in love with, and who visits him at his office."

After telling the great detective what she had discovered in relation to Miss Ferrier and her husband, she said:

"I heard him say this to her: 'The old lady'—meaning me—'is of a very delicate constitution. She is not likely to live more than six months, and when she dies you and I will take a trip to Europe.'"

"I hope you are not mistaken," the shameless creature replied, "for if your wife is alive next Christmas I must marry Horace Boughton."

"You shall never marry him," my husband fiercely exclaimed, "not if I can help it, and I can."

Mrs. Winze paused.

Nick Carter looked thoughtfully at the floor.

At last he said, firmly:

"I will take your case, madam, for I believe you are in the meshes of a terrible plot."

"Thank you," she replied, with a grateful expression.

The next day after this interview the advertisement concerning the lost pocket-book appeared in the *Herald*.

The publication interested more than one party.

Nick Carter smiled when he read it.

He knew that it had been inserted by Clarice Ferrier.

On the day of the loss, Nick, made up as a man about town, happened to be coming up East Thirty-fourth street from the ferry, when Miss Ferrier, with her veil raised, ascended to the platform of the L train, and engaged the conductor in a short conversation.

When she had descended, Nick, out of curiosity, determined to find out, if possible, what Mrs. Winze's rival's business with the conductor was.

An hour or so later he had a talk with the conductor himself.

The great detective not only learned that Miss Ferrier had lost a pocket-book, but he got a description of several persons who were in the car with the society belle during her ride.

The next evening he called on Mrs. Winze in the character of a tough.

"Among other things," said Nick, "I have discovered that Miss Ferrier has employed a detective to recover a pocket-book which she lost in a car of the elevated yesterday."

The doctor's wife was all interest at once.

"The book contained a small sum of money, a theatre ticket and some memorandums. She would not have hired a detective to recover either the money or the

ticket. Therefore, it is the memorandums which she is so anxious to regain possession of. "Now what valuable memorandums could she have had?"

Mrs. Winze shook her head.

"For 'memorandums' substitute 'letters,' and the cause of her anxiety is apparent."

"I begin to see."

"Certainly you do," said Nick, with a smile. "And she wouldn't throw away a few hundred dollars to recover ordinary letters. Ergo, the letters she has lost contain matters of a delicate nature. Now, who would be likely to write compromising letters to her?"

"The doctor," exclaimed Mrs. Winze, quickly. "And, oh, Mr. Carter, if you can obtain these letters my case will be clear. I shall then have no trouble in obtaining a divorce."

"I think myself that the letters will prove your case. I have already located the person who now holds them."

"Who is he?"

"An ex-convict named James Hone—better known as Jimmy the Glib."

"Describe him."

"He is short, thickset, with a round, babyish face, and a pair of small, gimlet eyes."

"Miss Ferrier will suspect him."

"He was not a passenger at the time she lost her pocket-book."

"Then how can he be the thief?"

"He is a thief because he retains property which does not belong to him."

"How did he come into possession of the book, Mr. Carter?" said Mrs. Winze, with a puzzled look.

"I will explain. In the first place, the book was stolen by a baby."

"What!"

"By a baby," repeated Nick, soberly. "On one side of Miss Ferrier sat an old woman. On her lap was the baby. It is a lively child, and more than once made grabs at Miss Ferrier's hands, and at the

watch chain at her belt. This I learned from a gentleman who sat opposite to her. On the other side of Miss Ferrier sat an asthmatic old man, who kept his hands in his pockets, and had his face covered with a muffler. Most persons, after hearing of the circumstances, would put him down for the thief."

"I certainly would, Mr. Carter."

"After sitting beside her for several blocks, much to her discomfiture, for he wheezed terribly, he got up and went to a vacant seat in the corner; he was on the train when Miss Ferrier got off."

"Now," continued Nick, "do you think it likely that a thief, after having done a neat piece of work, would remain near his victim for an unnecessary length of time?"

"No."

"So I reasoned. He would have got off at the first station. The asthmatic let several stations pass; he did not even leave the train when Miss Ferrier got off."

"But the baby, Mr. Carter—how could it have taken the pocket-book without Miss Ferrier's knowledge?"

"Very easily. You must remember that Miss Ferrier was just returning from a visit to the doctor. Her mind was filled with thoughts of him. She was therefore abstracted, and gave but little attention to her surroundings. At times she noticed the actions of the baby with listless interest; at others, her thoughts were far away from it."

"Now, at one of these periods, according to my reasoning—which, by the way, has proved to be correct—she allowed the book to slip from her hand into her lap. Then it was that the baby snatched it."

"But the mother must have seen the action."

"So she did, and her first impulse was to return the pocket-book to Miss Ferrier. The second, when she saw the baby's action had not been observed, was to keep it, for she is a washerwoman, and very

poor, while the dress and style of Miss Ferrier indicated affluence and aristocratic tastes. The moment the baby got the book the old woman's hands closed over it, and it was quickly thrust under the child.

"Acting upon the deductions I had made after obtaining all the information I could from the conductor and one of the passengers, I set out to find the woman and the baby.

"I have said that she was a washer-woman. The smell of soapsuds which saluted the nostrils of the passenger who sat opposite to her, together with the appearance of her hands, induced me to believe that such was her occupation.

"She got off at Fifty-ninth street. Two blocks from there I found a number of poor dwellings, and in one of them the woman I was in search of.

"I used a little deception when I appeared before her. 'Mrs. Carnes,' I said, 'I was on the L train yesterday when your baby snatched a pocket-book from a young lady. I have come for it.'

"At my words, quickly and sternly spoken, she trembled and turned pale.

"Come,' continued I, 'this is a serious matter. Produce the book or make ready to accompany me to jail.'

"I—I haven't got it,' she whimpered, 'I was looking at it when Jimmy the Glib came in and snatched it out of my hands.'

"What is Jimmy to you?' I asked.

"He's my son-in-law. He married my daughter, who is dead, sir—rest her soul. It's her baby that I'm raising.'

"I knew Jimmy the Glib well, though I hadn't seen him since he was released from Sing Sing for buncoing a New Jersey clergyman.

"Where is he?' I demanded.

"I don't know, sir.'

"Where does he lodge?' I asked.

"I have no idea, sir. He never told me.'

"Have you seen him since he took the pocket-book from you?"

"No, sir.'

"The woman's voice and manner convinced me that she was telling the truth. I left her to begin a search for Jimmy.

"I had three hours at my disposal, for at two o'clock in the afternoon I intended to be at the Garden Theatre matinee, for Mrs. Carnes had informed me that she had looked at the theatre ticket and seen that it was for Wednesday afternoon's performance.

"I did not expect to find Jimmy the Glib in Miss Ferrier's seat, for I had too much respect for the fellow's cunning to imagine that he would give himself away by using the ticket. Some one else might use it, though, and besides—— But I will come to that later on.

"Not finding my man within the time mentioned, I went to the Garden Theatre. The seat which the lost ticket called for was occupied by a young girl, whose face bespoke an honest, guileless character. Your husband sat in the seat adjoining on the left."

"The villain!" ejaculated Mrs. Winze.

"I expected to find him there, so I was not surprised. But I made another discovery which I had not looked for. The seat on the right of the young girl was occupied by a detective."

"Hired by Miss Ferrier, I'll be bound."

"I came to that conclusion from the looks he cast upon the girl and the doctor."

"Do you know him?"

"By reputation, yes. He is a shrewd chap, but he is not at the top of his profession yet. He was in disguise, but I easily penetrated it."

Mrs. Winze's face fell for a moment.

"It's woman against woman, and detective against detective," she said, then quickly added, as her expression changed to one of indomitable resolution, "but the

right is on our side, and we must and will succeed."

"I hope so," said Nick.

Then he continued: "Huttell, the detective, followed the young girl home. I followed Huttell.

"He did not attempt to interview her. But he has by this time probably discovered that the girl found the ticket on the doorstep of her mother's house.

"It was undoubtedly placed there by Jimmy the Glib. Not daring to use the ticket himself, he threw it down in front of Mrs. Chaney's door."

"Is the girl's name Rose Chaney?"

"Yes."

"I know her. I have often employed her in dressmaking. She is a modest, hard-working, respectable girl. It can't be possible that she is intimately acquainted with this disreputable ex-convict."

"She does not know that he exists."

"I am glad of it."

Nick rose to depart.

At that moment the door-bell rang.

"Some one after the doctor probably," said Mrs. Winze. "Such calls are frequent."

The servant came in presently with an envelope in her hand.

"I went to the door and found no one there," she said. "But this letter lay on the sill."

A gleam of understanding came into Nick Carter's eyes.

Mrs. Winze opened the envelope and read the lines written on the enclosure with a face that expressed a variety of emotions.

Then, without a word, she handed it to the great detective.

It ran thus:

"Mrs. Winze—

"Dear Madame: I have in my possession a number of letters written by your husband to Miss Clarice Ferrier. They are corkers, and give the doctor dead away. You may have them on payment

of one thousand dollars. Put a personal in the *Herald* addressed to M. E., if you want to invest. Arrangements can be made afterward. M. E."

"The handwriting is that of a woman," said Mrs. Winze, when Nick had finished his reading.

"Undoubtedly. And yet it was dictated by a man. The wording shows that. No woman, who spells correctly and uses fair English, injects slang into a business communication like this."

Nick looked at the note again, this time more closely.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "we were both wrong in one respect."

"What is that?"

"The note was not written wholly by a woman."

"How do you know that?"

"Because the names 'Mrs. Winze' and 'Miss Ferrier,' show another person's earmarks, so to speak."

Mrs. Winze looked at the names and shook her head.

"I cannot detect any difference," she said.

"But I can, Mrs. Winze, for I have made a study of handwriting. Whoever wrote the names of yourself and the woman who is trying to supplant you, and it was probably a man, endeavored to imitate the hand of the person who wrote the body of the note.

"The failure to do this successfully arose from the fact that a different pen was used, and from the further fact that he was unable to make his letters with the delicacy and precision that characterized the effort of his amanuensis. Besides, in the matter of Miss Ferrier's name, the space was so small that he was obliged to crowd the letters somewhat."

"But why should this double authorship have been necessary?"

"I will suppose a case, and then perhaps you may understand why the person

who has these letters for sale has taken this peculiar action.

"Let us suppose that he is acquainted with a young lady who has no idea that he is other than an honest, well-meaning young man. He obtains the letters and resolves to undertake a course of blackmail. His shrewdness and cunning teach him that it would be a dangerous policy to write letters himself to the persons he has selected as his victims. Under some pretext, he induces the young lady to write his communications for him. But he does not give her the names, for such a proceeding might awaken her suspicions. So he has the letters written, all but the names, which he afterward puts in himself."

"Your reasoning is very ingenious, Mr. Carter," said Mrs. Winze, with a look of appreciation. "Now, if you found the young lady, she might give you the information that would lead you to the place where the holder of the letter resides."

"I believe she might."

Mrs. Winze went to a secretary, opened a drawer, and taking up a number of letters, selected one and handed it to the detective.

"I think I can aid you," she said, with a smile. "Please compare the writing of this letter with that of the note just received."

Nick did so.

"They were written by the same person," was his quick comment. "And the letter you just gave me is signed 'Rose.' It can't be——"

"Yes," the doctor's wife interrupted, "it can be, for it is."

"Then Jimmy the Glib had for an amanuensis——"

"Rose Chaney."

CHAPTER III.

THE DOCTOR BECOMES DESPERATE.

Nick Carter was surprised when the evidence showing that Rose Chaney's

hand had written the body of the blackmailing effusion was presented to him.

"I said a few minutes ago," he remarked, to Mrs. Winze, "that the girl had no idea that such a person as Jimmy the Glib exists. I will now qualify that assertion by saying that she does not know that the smart young man who induced her to write the note is Jimmy the Glib. But through her assistance," he added, "I hope to find my man."

Nick left the house, but not to seek his own fireside.

While he counted on running Jimmy the Glib to earth through the information which Rose Chaney would probably be able to give him, he yet resolved to put in a few hours in search for his man without other aid than a knowledge of the thief's old haunts gave him.

"If I don't run across him to-night," ran his thoughts, "I will call on Miss Chaney in the morning."

Nick knew of a low resort that Jimmy the Glib had been in the habit of frequenting before he was sent to prison.

It was within a few blocks of the approach to the Brooklyn Bridge.

Before he had gone a mile he discovered that he was being followed by a roughly-dressed man of tall figure.

Who could the fellow be?

It irritated the great detective to think that his disguise had been penetrated, and that the fact of his employment by Mrs. Winze was known to a third party.

It was not until Nick turned into Water street that he took practical measures to hoodwink his shadow.

Stepping into a dark hallway, he waited for the unknown to approach.

But the fellow was wary.

He had seen Nick dart into the hallway, and instead of walking boldly forward, he stepped around the corner again.

Nick heard the retreating footsteps and smiled.

"I'll fool him yet," he said to himself, grimly.

The stairs from the hallway led to a tobacco factory.

There was another entrance by way of the street into which the shadower had retreated.

Nick knew the proprietor of the factory, and had once before made use of the two entrances.

Quickly ascending the stairs, he opened the factory door by means of a key which the foreman had given him.

Once inside, he made a rapid change in his personal appearance.

Two minutes after his entrance into the establishment had not elapsed before he was noiselessly descending the other stairs.

Arrived at the street entrance, he halted and peered down the sidewalk in the direction of Water street.

The shadower was just turning the corner, having made up his mind that he would lose his quarry if he remained in concealment any longer.

Nick boldly stepped after him.

As he turned the corner, the spy looked back with a start, but after noting that the oncomer was garbed like a seaman, and used his legs like one, he resumed his walk.

At the hallway of the tobacco factory he stopped, and the electric light permitted Nick to see his face and person distinctly.

He was heavily bearded, and wore a large slouch hat, which was pulled down so as to conceal his eyes.

"Another clever disguise," thought Nick, with an inward chuckle, "but there's but one nose in New York like that, and it belongs to Dick Huttell."

The great detective guessed why he was being shadowed.

In some manner Huttell had learned of Nick's engagement by Mrs. Winze, and he was now taking the initiatory steps

toward preventing his professional rival from capturing the thief who held the compromising letters.

Nick stopped when he came opposite the other detective.

Pretending to be considerably under the influence of liquor, he asked, in a thick voice:

"Shay, old son, wheresh South street?"

Huttell gave the required direction curtly.

"S'loon down there kep' by fel' called I'sh Hank?"

"Yes."

"Think I c'n git there half'n hour, mate?"

"If you walk fast."

"Gotter be there, or I'll looshe twenny dol's."

"Then hurry on. You're wasting time talking to me," said Huttell, impatiently.

"Don' care for th' twenny dol's, but hate ter dis'point Nick. He'sh ole fren' mine, ish Nick."

"Nick who?" asked Miss Ferrier's detective, quickly.

The false sailor winked one eye, and grinned cunningly.

"Mushn't tell," he answered. "It's a shecret, on q. t. Un'stan'?"

"No. But I presume you are to do this Mr. Nick a service, eh?"

"That'sh what, mate."

"I'll bet," continued Huttell, dropping his voice, and looking carefully about as if fearful of being overheard, "that we are on the same lay."

"What, you workin' fer Nick, too?"

"I am working for Nick, certainly."

"Who'sh your Nick?"

"Tell me the name of yours, and I'll tell you whether he's my Nick or not."

The false sailor shook his head.

"T'won' do," he replied. "It's a shecret; musn' be give away. Un'stan'?"

Huttell took a flask of whisky from his pocket, and removing the stopper, put it to his lips.

"Ah!" he exclaimed in satisfaction, "but that's the stuff to take the chill off. Have a drink, partner?"

Nick reached out his hand eagerly.

Huttel saw him drink with an expression of malicious joy.

"Now I'll get him," he thought.

Nick handed the flask back with the emphatic comment:

"Res' stuff I've tackled since I lef' Jamaica."

"Nick gave it to me."

"Bully fer Nick, who mus' be a brick when he ain' sick an' is able ter kick," rejoined the false sailor in a rollicking voice.

"Nobody like Nick Carter," said Huttell, boldly.

"Betcher life. An' we're both workin' fer him. Ain' that funny?"

"Very funny indeed."

"Well, I mus' go. Gotter be at I'sh Hank's 'n half 'n hour."

"Nick is waiting for you, then, I suppose," said Huttell, insinuatingly.

"Cer'nly."

"I'll bet it's about the same business he has entrusted me with."

"What'sh that?"

"Let's compare notes, and then we'll know all about it."

Nick looked up and down the street, his body swaying as he did so.

Then he looked toward the staircase of the tobacco factory.

"Thish no place t' talk, mate, speshly 'bout shecret. Sabe?"

"Yes."

"If I had time, I'd shay les' go upstairs 'n talk."

"I'll get you to Irish Hank's in time. I have a cab waiting down the street for me."

"Hones' Injun?"

"Do you think I'd lie?" indignantly.

"I'll tell you aft' I've taken 'nother drink."

Huttell passed over the flask with alacrity.

The false sailor held the mouth of the flask to his lips for nearly a minute.

When he removed it, he said, firmly:

"'Th' man as says you're liar's gotter fight me. Un'stan'?"

"That's all right. And now will you step up the stairs?"

"Betcher gizzard, mate."

Nick Carter could scarcely conceal his satisfaction as he followed his unsuspecting quarry to the dark landing above.

Huttell might have had a suspicion that he was being played with, if the idea had entered his brain before this that Nick Carter had discovered the fact of his employment by Miss Ferrier.

But secure in the belief that his employment was not suspected, and carried away, besides, by his eagerness to spike his rival's guns, he had accepted the false sailor's statements as truth.

Arrived at the head of the stairs, Nick proceeded to give Huttell an unwelcome surprise.

Taking the rival detective unawares, he sprang upon him, hurled him to the floor and had his fingers twined about his throat before Huttell could fairly realize what had happened.

"Not a word, not a whisper," hissed Nick, "or I'll choke the life out of you."

Huttell was a brave man, and in spite of the threat, he made a valiant effort at resistance.

In vain.

Believing that the end justified the means, Nick put forth all his skill and strength in the work of subjugating his adversary, and in a few moments had Huttell bound and gagged.

Unlocking the factory door, he dragged his victim into the main room, used by the workmen.

"Now," said Nick, disguising his voice, when he had closed the door, "I am going to tell you something that will

surprise you as much as the attack I made on you. I am the man you have been hunting, and whom Nick Carter would give five hundred dollars to catch. I have got the letters"—tapping his pocket—"and you'll never see them until I've made them produce a big wad of dough. See?"

Huttell blinked his eyes a moment and then closed them.

"I mean you no harm," pursued Nick, "and I will send a man up here to release you in a couple of hours, perhaps sooner. Good-by, Mr. Huttell, and while I am gone, you can put in the time concocting some nice tale to pour into Miss Ferrier's ears to-morrow."

If the great detective could have seen the expression of Huttell's face as the above words were uttered, he might have remained longer in the room with him.

It was after midnight when Nick reached the low resort several blocks below, on Water street, where he hoped to pick up some information regarding Jimmy the Glib.

The joint's front door was closed, but Nick went boldly to the side entrance, gave a peculiar knock, and was instantly admitted.

Half a dozen persons were in the bar-room, one of whom stood at the counter sipping a glass of hot Scotch.

He turned his head and sharply regarded the newcomer.

It was Jimmy the Glib.

Nick had not expected such a stroke of good luck.

The ex-convict's face was flushed, and there was an angry frown on his face.

He had been drinking heavily.

Beckoning to the disguised detective, he called out, roughly:

"Come up here, tarpaulin, and astonish yer stomach with some of this elegant booze."

Nick gave a litch to his trousers and quickly complied.

One drink was followed by another, Nick doing his share of the treating, until Jimmy the Glib could scarcely keep his feet.

The great detective wondered at his recklessness, for in the old days he was accounted one of the most temperate crooks in the metropolis.

Perhaps he had met with some great misfortune, and was drowning his sorrow in drink.

Nick made up his mind to stick to Jimmy like a leech.

It is no unusual thing for strangers, meeting when both are well primed with liquor, to strike up a violent friendship.

Nick resolved to try a game of this kind on the despondent thief.

Much to his joy, though somewhat to his surprise, his sociable advances were met more than half way.

After they had stood at the bar counter for more than half an hour, and Jimmy the Glib had imbibed enough whisky to floor an ordinary drunkard, and Nick had seemingly done the same, the thief suddenly threw his arms around his companion's neck and burst into a flood of tears.

"Old fel'," he cried, in maudlin accents, "I've been played for a sucker an' I don' care who knows it."

"Les' go out an' lick ther bloke that did ther playin', mate," advised the false sailor, with a belligerent look.

Jimmy the Glib laughed bitterly.

"Find him? Did you ever try to fin' a needle in a haystack? Shay?"

"No."

"Or th' man what struck Billy Patterson?"

"Who'sh he?"

"He'sh firs' cousin to th' bloke that put th' soup ter me."

"What'd he do to you?"

"Who?"

"Bill Pat'son's firs' cousin."

"He beat me out o' th' chance of makin' fi' thousan' shiners."

"How?"

A knock at the side door arrested the answer that trembled on the thief's lips.

The barkeeper opened the door and admitted a handsome, distinguished-looking man of about thirty-five.

He seemed ill at ease, and after glancing about the room, said, in a low voice, to the barkeeper:

"I expected to find a party here, who wishes to be known as 'Sikesey.'"

Jimmy the Glib heard the words and turned around quickly.

Straightening himself up, he waved his hand and said, theatrically:

"I am the man you seek."

Nick Carter again wondered at the thief's recklessness.

He was acting in a most peculiar manner for one who had been noted for his shrewdness and cunning.

As for the newcomer, the great detective at once recognized him as Dr. Winze.

Jimmy the Glib stepped toward a private room at the rear and beckoned the doctor to follow him.

Nick was debating as to his next course of action, when Jimmy the Glib wheeled quickly when he was within a few feet of the door, and addressing the false sailor, said, in a tone of command:

"Come, this your pie as well as mine."

This speech was even more mystifying than the thief's previous actions.

But Nick did not hesitate a moment.

He followed the doctor and Jimmy the Glib into the private room.

The thief, after closing and locking the door, sat down in a chair and motioned for his two companions to do the same.

The great detective, whose brain had been working rapidly for the last moment or two, now began to have a shrewd idea of the situation.

But Dr. Winze seemed more ill at ease than ever.

Glancing suspiciously at Nick Carter, he asked:

"Who is this man?"

Jimmy the Glib, who had become partially sober, at once responded:

"Don't you know him?"

"Me? No."

The thief looked at the doctor sharply.

Then he said, with a wink at Nick, which he took care Mrs. Winzet's husband did not observe:

"He's a friend of mine—in fact, we're pards."

"Oh!"

The tone of relief in which this was uttered made Jimmy the Glib smile.

"Now to business," said the latter, in a brisk, sober tone. "I wrote you a note yesterday afternoon making an appointment for this place. In it, I promised to give you information which would lead to the recovery of certain letters written by you to Miss Clarice Ferrier, provided you come to the centre with one thousand dollars."

"Yes, yes," rejoined the doctor, anxiously.

"I want one hundred dollars before I open my mouth to put you on the track."

Dr. Winze frowned.

"That is no way to do business. I may be throwing so much money away."

"Suit yourself," said Jimmy the Glib, indifferently, "for that's my way of doing business. I'm not particular about trading with you, anyway," he went on, "for since I wrote the letter I have thought of a new scheme to raise the wind. Your wife——"

"Say no more," interrupted Dr. Winze, as his face suddenly paled. "Here is the money."

He opened his pocketbook, selected two notes of fifty dollars each, and handed them to the thief.

Nick Carter looked on with a quiet smile.

He could have prevented this black-

mailing operation, but to have done so might have seriously interfered with his plans for the relief of Mrs. Winze.

"Now," said the doctor, as he put away the pocket-book and buttoned his coat, "for the information. You have the letters yourself, I presume."

Jimmy the Glib shook his head.

"I know where they are, though," he replied, "and they are under my control. You didn't think I'd be such a fool as to bring them here, did you?"

"Why not?"

"You might have put up a job on me to get them," said Jimmy, with a cunning leer.

"I can put up the job now, my man, if I feel inclined, for you have admitted that you know where the letters are."

The thief laughed in the doctor's face.

"Rats!" he contemptuously responded. "What can you do? Arrest me? Would that action produce the letters? Not much, for the minute you play a trick of that kind the letters will be put into your wife's hands. I know what I am about, doctor, and I didn't run any risk at all in making the appointment to meet you here; no, not if you had brought a dozen detectives along with you. Ain't that so, mate?" turning to Nick, with a curious grin.

"That's so," was the prompt reply.

Dr. Winze gazed steadily in the audacious thief's face for a moment.

Then his eyes began to scintillate murderously.

Jimmy the Glib, having no suspicion of what was coming, leaned back in his chair and chuckled maliciously.

Quick as a flash the doctor drew a revolver, and with the butt of it struck the thief a resounding blow on the head, and then turned to give Jimmy the Glib's alleged friend and partner some of the same medicine.

But his wrist was caught and twisted,

and the revolver wrenched out of his hand in a twinkling.

Then a blow that caught him between the eyes doubled him up in a corner.

"You acted like a fool, doctor," said Nick Carter, quietly, as he stood over him ready to bestow further punishment upon him if necessary.

The doctor rose unsteadily to his feet, apparently cowed.

"So I have," he said.

He staggered to a chair and pressed his hands to his aching head.

"My advice is," continued Nick, "that you go home and leave the matter of the recovery of the letters to me."

As he said this he nodded his head significantly at Jimmy the Glib, who had just opened his eyes.

"Can't you place them in my hands tonight?" asked the doctor, with a groan.

"No; but I may call at your office and tell you something that will settle this letter business forever before twenty-four hours have passed."

"I'll give you two thousand dollars," said Dr. Winze, desperately, "if you will place those documents in my hands."

"Rely on me to find them," said Nick, with an enigmatical smile. "And now go before there is further trouble."

The doctor put on his hat, which had fallen to the floor, and accompanied by the detective, started for the side door of the saloon.

While there Nick was seized with a violent fit of coughing.

Dr. Winze paid no attention to this, but hurried rapidly down the street.

Nick watched his departure with a peculiar smile.

The smile did not disappear, but rather deepened, when he heard some person down the street whistling "After the Ball."

Closing the door, he returned to the private room.

Jimmy the Glib was sitting up with a savage expression on his face.

"I'll do him up if I hang for it," he said, hoarsely, as he saw Nick.

"Who, the doctor?"

"Of course."

"Better let him alone. I'll attend to him."

Nick no longer talked like the sailor.

To his mind, the necessity for that disguise no longer existed.

"I thought you were a detective," said Jimmy the Glib, "when I asked you to come in here. Now I know it."

"I am a detective."

— — —

CHAPTER IV.

A SCHEME WHICH FAILED.

Nick Carter sat down so as to face the thief, and regarded him with a smile.

"You have made a hundred dollars on the letter racket, Jimmy," said the great detective, "but you won't make a cent more."

"Why won't I?"

"Because you can't deliver the goods; that is to say, you haven't got the letters."

"How do you know I haven't?" asked the thief, in surprise.

"Observation, and putting two and two together."

"You want to work me for points—I see your game," returned Jimmy, surlily.

"You have worked yourself," said Nick, calmly. "When I entered the room I knew that you had lost the letters. Your actions at the bar showed this. Do you think, if you had had the documents which promised you such a rich return that you would have come to this saloon to keep an appointment with Dr. Winze, and proceeded upon your arrival to fill yourself up with bad whisky and make an all-around ass of yourself?"

Jimmy the Glib winced, but he said nothing in reply.

"Of course you wouldn't. You had lost the letters and you were all broke up, so to speak. To drown your rage and disappointment, you tried to get drunk, and because you were drunk and reckless, you made a partial confidant of the first stranger that you happened to meet—that's me."

"I had nothing to loose by opening up a little to you," grunted the thief.

"I know it."

"And when the doctor came in, I braced up and determined to play him for a hundred if I could," he continued.

"I was on to your game, Jimmy."

"I thought at first that you were a detective employed by him, but the way he spoke and acted soon convinced me that you were working for the other side."

"I admire your penetration, while I have little respect for your recklessness, Jimmy."

"You may keep your opinions to yourself," replied the thief, surlily.

"I think I have a right to be frank, blunt, if you will, after the favor I did you in saving your life to-night."

"That's so; I had forgotten. That was a good turn you did me. I'm glad now I invited you to come in."

"May I ask why you were desirous of my company during your confab with the doctor?"

"You're so smart about other things—can't you guess this?"

"I think I can. You were afraid the doctor might work some game on you, and you wanted a backer."

"That's about the size of it. I was making a desperate play for the hundred dollars, and I thought that, as the capture of it wouldn't require any valuable return on my part, you would be willing to wink your eye at the racket, take half the swag, to be plain, and say nothing."

"You have a poor opinion of detectives," said Nick, coldly.

"Oh, I know 'em. They're all on the

make. Dough is what they're after, and whatever virtue they may possess will never strike in and kill them."

Nick let this contemptuous opinion go without comment.

Jimmy the Glib's ideas on moral ethics and the sinuosities of human nature did not interest him a particle.

"Suppose I say to you," he said, after a pause, and giving the thief a look that made him turn pale, "that I am going to take you to jail for blackmailing the doctor."

"I would say, take me and be blowed, for the doctor will never prosecute me."

"Perhaps not, Jimmy, but I could fix it so that you would remain in jail a month or two before your case came to trial."

The thief bit his lips angrily.

"What do you want of me?" he said, snappishly. "Spit it out, quick, for I want to hunt my roost."

"I want you to tell me all you know about the letters."

"I'm willing to do that."

"Then go ahead."

"I got them from Mrs. Carnes, my mother-in-law. She——"

"Never mind where she found them. It is your part in the play that I am interested in."

"Well, I took the pocket-book from her, threw the theatre ticket away——"

"You didn't place it purposely on Mrs. Chaney's doorstep, then?"

"No. I don't know Mrs. Chaney."

"Nor her daughter?"

"Didn't know she had a daughter."

Nick looked surprised at this announcement.

"Didn't you get her to write you a note which you afterwards sent to Mrs. Winze?"

"No, I never wrote to Mrs. Winze. My only dealings thus far have been with the doctor."

Nick was satisfied from the thief's

voice and manner that he was speaking the truth.

Here, then, was another mystery.

Perhaps the explanation would come before the thief finished his story.

"What did you do after you got the letters in your hands?" said Nick.

"I took them to a friend of mine."

"That friend was a woman, wasn't it?"

"Yes."

"What's her name?"

"Cora Laplace, curse her."

"Where does she live?"

"One Hundred and Thirty-eighth street—Harlem."

"Rose Chaney resides in Harlem, and not far from Mrs. Laplace's," thought the detective.

"What is her business, if she has any?" was Nick's next question.

"She is a dressmaker."

"So is Rose Chaney," said the detective to himself, and here again he put "two and two together," and made a satisfactory deduction.

"I gave them to her, told her what my plan was—she and I am pretty thick, you understand—on the q. t., though—and she agreed to help me all she could.

"When I left her yesterday afternoon to send the note to Dr. Winze, I said this to her: 'Cora, there's big money in these letters. Don't lose 'em, for if you do, I will wring your neck.' I didn't mean that she should take my words literally, but now I am satisfied that she did."

"Why? What occurred afterward?"

"At six o'clock I returned to her house. She was not there, but on her bureau was an envelope directed to me."

Jimmy the Glib put his hand in his pocket and took out a crumpled note and handed it to Nick.

The latter read the following:

"Dear Jimmy: The letters have been stolen, and I'm so afraid you'll do me harm that I have gone into the country for a few weeks.

"CORA."

Nick Carter's success as a detective was owing not only to his courage and dash, but to his quick wit, his keen penetration, and his remarkable memory.

Looking at the note carefully, he became convinced that the writer was the same person who had penned the names of Miss Ferrier and Mrs. Winze to the blackmailing letter which had been sent to the latter lady.

But he did not give voice to his discovery.

He was not yet ready to tell Jimmy the Glib that his mistress had deceived him.

"I'll keep this if you have no objection," he said.

"And I'll keep the hundred dollars, eh?" returned the thief, with a grin.

"Yes."

Nick left Jimmy the Glib after informing him in unmistakable terms that if he bothered Dr. Winze he would soon find himself behind bolts and bars.

It was after two o'clock in the morning when he ascended the stairs leading to the tobacco factory for the purpose of liberating Dick Huttell.

To his astonishment, he saw a light burning in the workmen's room.

Knocking at the door, he was presently face to face with the foreman, with whom he was well acquainted.

"I am Nick Carter," he said, smilingly, as the foreman gazed doubtfully at the sailor's disguise.

"Oh."

"I came to see a man I left here awhile ago."

"Tied up?"

"Yes."

"Did you fix him?"

"I did."

"Gee whiz! Then I'm afraid I've put my foot in it, Mr. Carter."

"What! Have you released him?"

"That's what I've done."

Nick frowned.

"I had been to a ball," the foreman

went on to explain, hurriedly, "and I thought I would look in at the factory before I went home. Judge of my surprise when I found Mr. Huttell on the floor, bound and gagged. I took the gag out of his mouth first, and asked him who he was, and how he came here.

"He said he was a detective, told me to look in his pockets for papers to prove his assertion, and alleged that he had been attacked by thugs, who had a key to the door, and dragged him in.

"Then it was that I made a bad break. Says I to him: 'It would be a good joke if the thugs stole their key from Nick Carter.'

"What," said Huttell, "does my friend Nick Carter have a key to this place?"

"Yes," I replied, not thinking there was any harm in giving the fact away to a brother detective and friend."

Nick's lips curled contemptuously.

"A pretty friend he is," he remarked.

"I am sorry," began the foreman, when Nick interrupted him.

"I don't blame you a bit, Johnson," he said, frankly. "You were imposed upon, that's all."

The great detective left the factory, considerably vexed over Dick Huttell's escape.

He was still on Water street, but several blocks from the tobacco factory, when a man, armed with a sandbag, suddenly sprang from a doorway, and approaching from behind, raised his arm to strike. For an instant the sandbag was poised in the air.

Then it descended upon the detective's head, and he fell like a log on the sidewalk.

The assailant, who was tall and stoutly built, looked like a night-hawk.

He was stooping over the insensible body of his victim when a man, wearing a long ulster, with the collar drawn up so as to partially conceal his face, rushed

across the street, and hurriedly accosted the assassin.

The man in the ulster looked up and down the street.

Then he knelt beside the body of the great detective, and began a hurried exploration of his pockets.

While the man in the ulster was thus occupied, a negro came out of an alley a few doors below.

He saw the two men bending over the prostrate form of a third, and he ran toward them with blood in his eye.

The night-hawk heard him coming and started to run, but a policeman's club, thrown with a practiced hand, caught him on the side of the head, and sent him staggering to the sidewalk.

The negro then turned his attention to the man in the ulster, and he had that individual on his back and was giving him an unmerciful shaking, when Nick Carter revived and took a hand in the game himself.

For reasons of his own, he allowed the man who had sandbagged him to escape.

It was not his desire to arrest the fellow, and have the fact of the encounter get into the papers.

"I know you, Mr. Blunt Lightfoot," he said, sternly, as he assisted the rascal to his feet, "and if ever I want you I am going to get you. Now, travel."

Mr. Lightfoot traveled, and this narrative will know him no more.

Returning to the two men on the sidewalk—the man with the ulster and his negro assailant—Nick whispered a few words quickly in the latter's ear.

The negro instantly released his hold on his victim.

The man in the ulster staggered to his feet and made a motion to draw a pistol.

But he dropped his hand when he felt the cold muzzle of Nick's weapon against his temple.

"Don't," said the great detective,

quietly, "or Mrs. Winze will be a widow."

The scheming doctor uttered an imprecation.

"Curse you!" he hissed. "Am I never to get the better of you?"

"You won't to-night, I assure you."

"But I will, some day."

"Your chances of killing me won't be very good if I take you in tow for this night's work."

The doctor's face became as pale as death.

He changed his tactics instantly.

In the humblest of terms he begged Nick to let him off. The great detective concluded to do so.

As soon as the doctor had gone Nick extended his hand to the negro.

"Always on time, Chick," he said, with appreciative earnestness.

CHAPTER V.

NICK STRIKES THE TRAIL.

Nick Carter had not entered upon the case in Mrs. Winze's behalf without having taken Chick into his confidence and giving him certain instructions.

When Nick went into the saloon on Water street, he knew that his able assistant was in the near vicinity.

The coughing fit at the door, indulged in by Nick on the departure of Dr. Winze, was the signal for Chick to follow the doctor.

The latter walked rapidly, looking carefully about him until he reached Cherry street.

Here he stopped in front of a man standing in the shadow, and had a short conversation with him, at the end of which they went down the street together until they reached a saloon.

Chick saw them go in by the side entrance.

Five minutes passed, and they came out, the doctor having partially disguised

himself by an ulster which he must have procured in the saloon.

Chick soon recognized the doctor's companion as Blunt Lightfoot, and instantly surmised that some dark plot had been concocted.

The doctor and the thug started for Water street, and were within a short distance of the saloon in which the former had left Jimmy the Glib and the false sailor, when they were met by a man with a heavy beard and a large slouch hat pulled down over his eyes.

The latter took the doctor aside and whispered a few words into his ear.

The three men hurried away, and Chick lost sight of them for a time when they dashed into an alley a short distance above the tobacco factory.

He was exploring the alley, and had just discovered a way of exit through a tumble-down building at the rear, when the quick patter of feet across the Water street pavement made him turn and rush out of the alley.

"You know what happened after that," said he to Nick.

"If I don't know, I can guess," was the great detective's smiling response.

After he had told his story, Nick said:

"The man with the beard and slouch hat, who accosted Dr. Winze down the street was Dick Huttell."

"Then why didn't he show up when the circus was going on?"

"He wanted to save his reputation, I suppose."

"Then he must be somewhere about here."

"I don't think so. My idea is that he has met the doctor and gone to the latter's office with him. Suppose we go down that way?"

"I'm agreeable."

They hunted up a conveyance which took them to a point a short distance from the building where Dr. Winze's office was located.

Chick removed the grease paint from his face with a handkerchief, made a few changes in his appearance, and then leaving Nick a few doors below the office, softly ascended the stairs.

In a few minutes he rejoined his chief. "Huttell is in the office with the doctor," he said. "I recognized his voice, but I couldn't hear what was said."

The two detectives parted soon after, Chick having orders to shadow Dick Huttell the next day, while Nick took upon himself the task of finding the writer of the note sent to Mrs. Winze.

Among the many discoveries of the night was one which convinced him that the lost letters must contain more damaging allusions to the relationship existing between Dr. Winze and Clarice Ferrier than he had at first supposed.

Instance No. 1: The desperate effort of the doctor to obtain possession of the letters.

Instance No. 2: The co-operation of the doctor and Miss Ferrier and their joint employment of a detective.

"I wonder where Huttell contrived to meet Miss Ferrier yesterday," thought Nick. "It wasn't at the doctor's office, for she wouldn't dare to go there now. Ah, I have it. They met at Huttell's office."

Nick had made a correct guess.

After Huttell had reported the discoveries which followed his visit to the theatre, she had dispatched a messenger with a note to the doctor, requesting him to meet her an hour later at Starr & Co.'s detective agency.

While there they held a long and interesting conversation.

The doctor promised to furnish five thousand dollars, if necessary, toward the recovery of the letters.

When she returned home, Miss Ferrier found a letter awaiting her.

It was in a different handwriting from

that of the letter which Mrs. Wince had received, but it was to the same effect.

"M. E." would return the letters on payment of one thousand dollars.

Before she retired that night she sent a personal to the *Herald*.

Nick Carter read it in the morning while eating his breakfast.

"M. E.: Accept terms. Where can I meet you?"

"You Know Who."

"If I don't snare my bird," commented the great detective, "this sort of thing will be kept up until the price is raised to ten thousand dollars."

At ten o'clock he was at Mrs. Chaney's door.

Rose was within, and he was soon in conversation with her in the cozy sitting-room of the house.

He had introduced himself in this wise:

"I am a detective in search of certain information which I hope you may be able to furnish."

"I?"—in surprise. "You must have come to the wrong person."

"Your name is Rose Chaney, is it not?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you are a dressmaker?"

"I am."

"And you are acquainted with Miss Cora Laplace, another dressmaker living on this street?"

"I know her, yes."

"Is she your friend?"

"No; merely an acquaintance. I have met her at Madame Charmond's parlors. She is the Fifth Avenue modiste, I suppose you know"—Nick inclined his head—"and she has called on me once."

"May I ask when this call was made?"

"Yesterday afternoon."

"Did she ask you to do her a favor?"

"No."

"Did she say anything about finding anything?"

"No; the talk was upon commonplace matters."

"She said nothing about leaving the city?"

"No."

Nick took another tack and came straight to the point.

"You wrote a letter that evening for somebody, didn't you?"

Rose Chaney's answer came promptly:

"No, sir."

Nick Carter looked at her steadily for a moment, she wondering the while to what his questions were tending, and then cast his eyes to the floor in perplexity.

As he did so, he caught sight of a small paper-covered book lying at his feet.

It had evidently fallen from the table by which he was sitting.

This book gave him an idea.

His eyes kindled as he regarded it.

It was a printed copy of one of the late Dion Boucicault's popular plays.

Picking the book up, he remarked, with affected carelessness:

"You are a lover of the drama, I see?"

"I belong to an amateur association," she said, "and I also copy parts for the stage manager of — theatre, and any other parties who may desire my services."

"You copied a part last night, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir; but how did you know it? The gentleman who gave me the book said it was for a private entertainment to be given as a surprise to a society lady, and that I was to say nothing about the matter to any one."

"You will tell me about it, I am sure," returned Nick, earnestly, "when I inform you that a crime has been committed and that you have been made the innocent tool of the criminal."

Rose Chaney looked into Nick's honest face, felt the personal magnetism which he unconsciously exerted, and at once said:

"Ask me any questions you like, and I will answer them."

"Was the book printed from which the part you copied was taken?"

"Yes."

"Is it in your possession now?"

"It is. If you desire to see it, I will get it for you."

"I would very much like to look at it."

Rose left the room, to return in a few minutes with a pamphlet similar to the one the great detective had picked up from the floor.

It was entitled "The Blackmailer's Victim," and was a translation from the French.

Nick scanned the pages closely until he came to one where the villain of the play sits down to write a letter to a person he intends to blackmail.

The letter bore some similarity to the one sent to Mrs. Winze.

"Did you copy this verbatim?" Nick asked, as he put his finger on the letter?

"No."

"Why did you change it?"

"The gentleman who gave me the book said that the play was to be localized, and that another letter would have to be substituted for the one in the book. He dictated it to me, leaving blank spaces for the names, which he said could be afterward filled in."

"Did the gentleman remain while you were writing the part for him?"

"Yes, sir."

"How long did it take you?"

"Half an hour."

"And he took the letter away with him, I suppose?"

"He did, sir."

"Had you ever seen him before?"

"No, sir."

"How did he know that you did copying of the kind?"

"He said the stage manager of the Garden Theatre had recommended me."

"Can you describe him?"

"He was tall, had reddish hair and a pointed beard of the same color. As for

his dress, it was like that of most of the actors you may see any day promenading the Rialto. His other features did not impress themselves on my memory."

"What kind of a voice had he?"

"It was low and musical, and had one peculiarity, a slight lisp."

Nick Carter gave a start.

"I know you now, Mr. Smoothly," he said to himself, "and if I don't catch you, then luck will be terribly against me."

There was nothing more to be learned from Rose Chaney.

In the afternoon he went to his private office, where he found Chick and a note from Mrs. Winze.

The note read as follows:

"Dear Mr. Carter: The doctor has been at home all the forenoon, and two men have been with him most of the time in the library. I am afraid that some new plot against my peace is hatching. Come to me at once, if you can.

"HELEN WINZE."

CHAPTER VI.

NICK ON A FALSE SCENT.

Nick passed the note over to Chick without comment.

"I know who the two men were," he said. "Dick Huttell and a Broadway statue—'Billy the Turk,' the other mashers call him."

"What's up, think you?"

"Deviltry of some sort."

"It looks that way. You shadowed Huttell to the doctor's residence, I suppose?"

"Yes, after I had seen him part with Miss Ferrier at her house."

Nick rose to his feet.

"Keep your eye on Huttell for a while longer, Chick," he said, as they descended to the street, "for I suspect that he is planning some dangerous move against us."

"All right, Nick. He's at the —"

restaurant now, and when he comes out I'll camp on his trail till I hear from you again, or have run against something that will pay me for my trouble."

To reach Dr. Winze's residence, Nick had to pass the Garden Theatre.

He went to the office, and there, to his satisfaction, found the stage manager in conversation with the treasurer.

The moment the stage manager's eyes rested on the great detective he came out of the office beaming with smiles.

"Why, old fellow, where have you been?" he said, with great cordiality, as he extended his hand. "Haven't seen you for a dog's age."

"I have been very busy lately."

"Why, you and Byrnes and Steers and the rest of 'em ought to have all the rogues driven out of New York by this time."

"We drive some out," said Nick, with a smile, "but as fast as they go others come in. The steamers and the trains bring them, and while we have the rest of America and all of Europe to contend with, the battle with crime will continue. By the way, you know Miss Chaney, the copyist, I presume?"

"I have heard of her."

"Did you recommend her to a man yesterday who wanted the parts of a new play copied?"

"No."

Nick was not surprised.

In fact, he had expected a negative answer.

After some further conversation, on ordinary matters, Nick took his leave.

"The fellow who imposed on Miss Chaney is a cunning scoundrel," he said to himself, as he pursued his journey, "but it never entered his head, probably, that his agency in the affair would be traced to him by means of a baby."

"Having no suspicion that Mrs. Carnes would be suspected, he could not therefore foresee that the steps taken from

Mrs. Carnes to Jimmy the Glib, from Jimmy the Glib to Cora Laplace, and from the latter to Rose Chaney, would be the means of fastening the guilt upon himself.

"No doubt he reasoned in this way: 'Rose Chaney will be sought for by detectives anxious to recover the letters, and when they learn that she found the theatre ticket, and has no knowledge whatever of the letters, their interest in the pretty dressmaker will cease. Then I may step in and play my little game with her.'"

On reaching Dr. Winze's residence, Nick found Mrs. Winze anxiously awaiting him in the drawing-room.

"The doctor has gone out," she began, "but he acted so strangely that I wouldn't be surprised at his return at any moment."

"You have something to tell me besides what was written in your note," he said, with a searching glance at her pale face.

"Yes. I had some words with the doctor this morning. It was at the breakfast table. He was out of sorts, said he hadn't slept a wink, and accused me of being the cause of it."

"'You may blame your guilty conscience, not me,' I said."

"Then he turned upon me, and used the foulest language a man could utter."

"I was first dumbfounded, then enraged, and when I spoke I used words that I have since regretted."

"What did you say?"

"I told him I would soon be rid of such a brute; that I intended to apply for a divorce."

Nick looked grave, but said nothing.

"'Apply for a divorce, will you?' the doctor roared. 'We'll see about that, madame. Mark my words, you will be mighty glad to give that idea up before the week is over.'"

"When he left me I did not expect to

see him again before evening, but in an hour he returned with two men, and they were closeted in the library until nearly noon."

With the new information that Mrs. Winze had given him, Nick thought he saw through the doctor's latest scheme.

"You may receive a caller this afternoon," he said, "and it is my wish, as your agent, to remain in the house while he is here. Is there any place where I may conceal myself, and yet be able to overhear what will be said?"

"Will that screen do?"

"I can make it do, I think."

Nick lifted it from its position by the side of the window and placed it near a corner.

He was looking at the screen when there came a ring at the doorbell.

Mrs. Winze went to answer it herself.

Nick got behind the screen quickly.

In a few moments the doctor's wife ushered into the drawing-room an overdressed young man, with a face that might have been handsome but for its mark of dissipation and an ill-spent life.

Nick recognized him as Billy the Turk, the Broadway masher.

Mrs. Winze motioned him to a seat and then said coldly:

"You have come to me in reference to certain letters, you say?"

"Yes, madame."

"Well?"

"I am willing to place them in your hands at once."

Billy the Turk's apparent earnestness and sincerity did not deceive the doctor's wife.

She had reason to suspect his good faith, and her answer, therefore, did not betray any joy or satisfaction.

"You expect something in return, do you not?"

She had not taken a seat herself, but stood by the mantel, with one hand resting upon it.

"I am not a blackmailer, madame," he replied, with a fine assumption of indignation.

"I am rejoiced to hear it. Give me the letters, then, please."

Billy the Turk rose to his feet.

At that moment Nick Carter heard the front door softly open.

"Madame," said the masher, in a louder tone than before, and one charged with true dramatic fervor, "I have long admired you. I also deplore the unfortunate position in which you are placed."

Mrs. Winze had not expected this outburst, and her first impulse was to order the fellow to leave the house.

But the thought of Nick Carter's presence, and of the necessity for a little deception, in order that the wretch before her might show his hand plainly, induced her to say, with a weak semblance of anger:

"How dare you, sir?"

"My love makes me dare anything," Billy the Turk burst forth, with one hand on his heart, the other extended toward her, pleadingly.

"You have not brought the letters, then?" she said, ignoring his speech.

"Yes, I have, and they shall be yours if you will deign to look kindly on my suit."

"Let me see them first," she insisted.

Billy the Turk drew a package of bogus letters from his pocket and handed it to her.

Thrusting it into her bosom, she turned on him with a change of manner, all her contempt for the despicable masher showing itself in her face.

"Now, go," she said, and pointed toward the door.

Billy the Turk fell on his knees before her and seized her hands.

"No, no," he exclaimed, loudly, "I will not go; I will dare anything, even the coming of the doctor, for you have said that you love me, and that you will

fly with me. Go? Never, for you are mine now by the right of our mutual love."

While Mrs. Winze struggled to free herself, the door of the drawing-room was opened quickly, and two men rushed in from the hall. They were Dr. Winze and Dick Huttell, and they had been listening to the conversation.

Billy the Turk jumped to his feet in well-acted surprise and terror.

"Aha!" exclaimed the villainous doctor, "we have caught you nicely, madame. Sue me for a divorce now, will you?"

Mrs. Winze said nothing, but the look she gave him would have caused a man of finer sensibilities to hang his head.

Dick Huttell took Billy the Turk by the ear and led him to the door.

"Git, you hound," he said, with simulated sternness, "and consider yourself lucky in escaping with a whole skin."

When Huttell returned to the drawing-room Nick Carter felt that it was about time for him to show himself.

"I have this gentleman as a witness," said Dr. Winze to his wife, "and if you don't give up your idea of divorce, I'll disgrace you by a counter-suit and the publication in all the papers of what we heard and saw here this afternoon."

"No, you won't, doctor," said Nick Carter, quickly, as he slipped from behind the screen and confronted the pair of conspirators.

If a thunderbolt had descended at the feet of Mrs. Winze's rascally husband, he could not have been more surprised.

Huttell's face paled for a moment.

But quickly recovering his self-possession, he said, with a smile:

"I assure you, Mr. Carter, that I am no party to a conspiracy. I was asked to come here as a favor, but what I have seen and heard does not lower Mrs. Winze in my esteem one particle. Dr. Winze must have been blinded by jealousy, or he would not think of assailing the char-

acter of his wife upon such flimsy evidence as the artful utterance of such a liar as Billy the Turk."

Dr. Winze turned upon Huttell fiercely.

"Why, you——" he began, vehemently, but the swift, meaning glance which the detective shot at him made him stop suddenly.

He realized in an instant that he was no match for Huttell in cunning.

Nick Carter caught the glance and understood it perfectly.

"I am glad that you have taken this course, Mr. Huttell," Nick said, gravely, "for perhaps it saves me from the painful necessity of arresting both you and the doctor for criminal conspiracy."

Dr. Winze flared up at this.

"Leave my house, you scoundrel," he roared, "and never show your spying face in it again."

"I shall consult my own wishes in that respect," returned Nick, quietly.

Dr. Winze clenched his fist and moved toward the great detective as if to strike him down.

"Don't fool with me, doctor. It won't be a healthy proceeding for you," was Nick's low, stern utterance.

Huttell took the doctor by the arm and led him to a chair.

"Sit down," he said, in a disgusted voice, "and see if you can't come to your senses."

Mrs. Winze now left the room.

Nick Carter started for the door.

As he passed Huttell, he said, quietly but firmly:

"I must see you outside, immediately."

"All right."

Huttell followed Nick to the sidewalk.

There the great detective said:

"You must accompany me to the office of a notary public, and make affidavit that what you saw and heard in the drawing-room inside while Billy the Turk was present, was a part of a conspiracy of

which Mrs. Winze was to have been the innocent victim."

Huttell bit his lip and frowned.

"You are asking too much of me," he said, "for I can only infer that there was a conspiracy. Besides, there's no necessity for an affidavit, for the matter will go no further."

"All the same, I want your affidavit, Huttell," said Nick, firmly.

"Want and be blowed!" suddenly exclaimed the sorely pressed detective, and he sprang up the steps of Dr. Winze's house, entered the door, slammed it with a bang, and ran toward the rear.

On his way he caught sight of both Dr. Winze and his wife.

They were sitting in the drawing-room and conversing in low tones.

Beckoning the doctor to him, Huttell said, hurriedly:

"No. — Patchen Avenue, Brooklyn, at ten to-night."

He was gone before the doctor could say a word in reply.

Mrs. Winze heard Huttell's words, and when Nick Carter came in half an hour afterward, after the doctor had gone, she told him what Huttell had said.

"He didn't mean that I should hear, I am sure, Mr. Carter, but he was so greatly excited that he neglected to lower his voice sufficiently to keep his announcement from my ears."

"Then I'll be present at the meeting in Brooklyn," said Nick, with a satisfied expression. "I am glad you heard what he said, for now it doesn't matter whether Chick, my assistant, runs him down or not."

Nick then told her that he had seen Huttell escape by the back way, and had sent Chick after him.

The latter had followed the rascally detective to the house, and had been in waiting outside while the dramatic proceedings were going on within.

The doctor will try another scheme to

ruin my reputation, now this one has failed," said Mrs. Winze, in some agitation.

"I have no doubt of it, but I think I can put a spoke in his wheel of villainy, if I can overhear what he and Huttell may say to each other at their meeting to-night."

Nick left the house and went to his office.

He was there but a short time when Chick appeared, wearing a disappointed look.

"He doubled on me, got into a cab, rode a ways, jumped out in a mob of vehicles on Broadway, wriggled to the sidewalk like an eel, ran into a big clothing store, shot out the back way as I was coming in the front, and went the devil knows where."

Nick consoled his baffled assistant by informing him of the Brooklyn appointment.

"We have several hours at our disposal," he concluded, "and during that time we must find Cora Laplace, if possible."

"I am satisfied, Chick, after what has occurred, that she has two lovers. Jimmy the Glib is one, but his nose is out of joint at present; the other is the chap who holds the stolen letters."

"Now, my theory of the matter is this: Lover No. 2 visited Cora after Jimmy the Glib had gone out to post the blackmailing letter addressed to Dr. Winze."

"He either discovered her in the act of reading the letters, or else she told him that she had them. Realizing that there was a bonanza for him in the documents, he induced her to turn them over to him, and change her quarters, after leaving the decoy note for Jimmy the Glib."

"The next move of the smooth rascal was to go to Rose Chaney, and under pretext of having her copy a part in a play, induced her to write the body of the letter afterwards sent to Mrs. Winze."

"Leaving the pretty dressmaker's house, he went to Cora Laplace's new abode, and had her write the names of Miss Ferrier and Mrs. Winze in the blank spaces of the blackmailing letter. Then he sent it off for delivery."

After-developments proved Nick's theory to be true in every essential particular.

The two detectives went separate ways when they left Nick's office.

At eight o'clock in the evening they met by appointment near the approach to the Brooklyn Bridge.

"I have run her down, Nick," said Chick, with the natural exultation of a man who has done a good piece of work. "Found where she hangs out, and got a glimpse of her face at the window."

"Good. We'll pay her a call after we settle the Brooklyn matter."

It proved to be an old, unpainted house, standing in a large lot, and from external appearances—broken windows and a general air of neglect and unthrif—had not been occupied for some time.

They cautiously reconnoitered it, and could see neither lights nor hear voices.

After a while they entered it from the rear.

When every room had been explored, Nick Carter came to the conclusion that he had been duped.

"I see it all now," he said, to Chick, with an angry flash in his eyes. "Dick Huttell purposely spoke loud enough for Mrs. Winze to hear, on purpose to send me on a wild-goose chase."

"That's the trick, sure," assented Chick.

"We must hurry back to Dr. Winze's house. I fear that some new game has been sprung on us during our absence."

They reached the doctor's house at midnight.

Nick went boldly to the front door and rang the bell.

After a time a maid-servant appeared.

Nick looked into her scared face and feared the worst.

"Is Mrs. Winze at home?" he demanded, quickly.

"No, sir. She went away in a closed carriage two hours ago."

"Of her own accord?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know what caused her to go off?"

"No, sir. She got a message from somebody, and instantly put on her things and got into the carriage which was waiting outside."

"It was a forged message from me, I'll bet a hat," said Nick to Chick, with a lowering brow, when they had left the house, "and that scoundrel of a husband, aided by Dick Huttell, has spirited her away."

"We've got to find her, Nick," replied Chick, resolutely.

"If we don't," rejoined the great detective, "Dr. Winze will be a widower before long."

"Do you think he means to kill her?"

"I do. And," he added, quickly, as a new idea came to him, "I think I can guess the *modus operandi*. Mrs. Winze is in delicate health, and a succession of rude shocks, or a long and systematic course of fiendish treatment, would kill her."

"I begin to see what you are driving at, Nick. They have taken her to a private lunatic asylum."

"I am almost sure of it."

— — —

CHAPTER VIII.

UNMASKED AT LAST.

The next forenoon, while Miss Cora Laplace was engaged in the perusal of a French novel at her sitting-room in a flat on East One Hundred and Twenty-fifth street, a young man with reddish hair and Vandyke beard, opened the door and came in, with a smile on his face.

"Well?" she said, without rising.

"We've made the trip."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that Miss Ferrier has agreed to pay me eight thousand dollars for the letters."

"How did you manage it?" regarding him with mingled respect and admiration.

"I met her on the street and told her that the business would have to be settled to-day; that if she didn't come to the centre I would publish the letters and certain facts in connection with them which I have lately discovered."

"What did she say?"

"She accepted at once. Of course she'll get the money from Dr. Winze."

"Won't she lead you into a trap?"

"No danger of that. I have a pull she little dreams of."

"Well, John, I always said you were a cute one."

"I'm no slouch, if I do say it, Cora."

"You'll take that little trip to Paris with me as you promised, won't you, when you get the money?" said the woman slowly, and with eyes fixed on him keenly.

"Of course. I wouldn't dare to do otherwise. You might betray me, you know, if I didn't. By the way, I want the letters now. In an hour the transaction will be completed."

Miss Laplace arose and went to a closet.

As soon as her back was turned, the door, which had not been locked, was quickly opened, and two men rushed in.

They were Nick and Chick.

The former sprang on the man with the reddish hair and bore him to the floor.

Chick had a revolver leveled at Cora Laplace when she turned from the closet with the letters in her hand.

"Drop them!" said Chick, sternly, "or I'll pull the trigger."

The woman turned pale as death and threw the package of letters at his feet.

With the pistol still pointed at her, Nick's assistant stooped, picked up the letters, and put them in his pocket.

He then stepped to the door and opened it.

"You may go," he said.

Cora Laplace needed no second bidding.

Hastily donning a hat and wrap, she left the room without bestowing a glance at her fallen lover.

At the street door she encountered a policeman who took her in charge, and conveyed her to the Tombs.

Nick had his prisoner bound when Chick closed the door and turned toward him.

The man with the reddish hair had not yet uttered a word.

But the expression of his face was one of abject despair.

"You were not so smart as you thought you were," said the great detective, as he arose and stood over the prisoner.

The latter now found his voice.

"Kill me at once and do me a favor," he said, "for I can never outlive this disgrace."

"Bah! such fellows as you don't die of remorse. If you ever serve out a term in the prison to which I shall send you, the chances are that you'll become a bigger scoundrel than ever."

"Curse you!" shrieked the discomfited wretch. "How I wish now that I had killed you last night."

"You weren't so pretty then as you are now," returned Nick, quietly. "That black beard didn't become you as well as this terra cotta Vandyke. Let's see how you'll look without any disguise."

With these words he jerked the wig and false beard from the prostrate villain's head and face.

The features of Dick Huttell, the detective, were revealed.

Nick Carter had spotted Huttell as the man who held the compromising letters

on the occasion of his interview with Rose Chaney.

As has been said before, his theory as to Huttell's relations with Cora Laplace, and the steps the rascally detective had taken after discovering that his mistress had the letters, was the correct one.

Cora Laplace, to whom Huttell had confided all his secrets, made a full confession after reaching the Tombs.

Acting on the information she furnished, Nick Carter went to a private insane asylum near Morrisania, and there found Mrs. Winze.

She had been lured to the place upon the representation that she was to meet Nick Carter, who had something of great importance to communicate to her.

Dr. Winze was arrested at his office by the great detective.

He and Huttell were tried under one indictment for criminal conspiracy, and sentenced to five years each in Sing Sing.

Cora Laplace was made a witness for the prosecution.

After the trial she was given her liberty.

Miss Clarice Ferrier disappeared from New York after the arrest of Dr. Winze and Dick Huttell.

When Horace Boughton found that he had been deceived he vowed to remain a bachelor through life.

But the interest he is at present taking in a pretty little dressmaker, to whom he was introduced by Nick Carter, leads us to think that he may shortly reconsider his determination and become a Benedict after all.

He could not certainly find a worthier helpmeet than Rose Chaney.

Mrs. Winze got her divorce and recovered her health.

She is now enjoying the fortune left her by her uncle, and spends a large part of the income in works of charity.

One of her most valued friends is Nick Carter.

[THE END.]

The next number of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY will contain "Caught by Electricity; or, Nick Bags an Old Offender."

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